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# Improving career development through a Women mentoring program in the construction industry

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**Abstract.** Due to the high underrepresentation of women in the construction industry, researchers are proposing innovative solutions to attract and retain female workers in the profession. The study examined the prospects of improving career development through women mentoring programs in the construction industry. Using an in-depth content analysis of literature, the study extracted barriers and impact of women mentoring programs. The study showed that in order to access the positive potential outcome for female students and workers there are barriers that must be surpassed. The barriers to an effective woman mentoring program identified in this study are both internal and external in nature. Once the barriers to women mentoring programs are not effectively suppressed it would lead to negative mentoring experiences. The study highlighted that in order for women mentoring programs to be effective both mentors and mentees should have gone through a mentoring training/workshop. This would help harness their individual characteristics, ability to set goals, ensure professionalism and the ability to give/receive feedback. The study identified potential outcomes of an effective women mentoring program in the construction industry.

**Keywords:** *Career development, Construction Industry, Mentee, Mentor, Women*

## 1. Introduction

Construction is an important aspect of the society as all infrastructure, roads and building are a part of construction. The term construction is very complex as it includes a diverse association with buildings and construction professionals. The construction industry includes a vast amount of occupations ranging from Builder, Service Engineers, Architects to Quantity Surveyors, these all come under the umbrella term construction careers [1]. For a sustainable construction industry that balances the issues of gender and equity, suggestions have been hinged on increasing the quota of women in the construction profession. In order to allay the issues concerning low participation of women, previous literature have opined that mentoring is crucial for the construction industry as it is a means of developing leaders within the industry [2].

Mentoring is about teaching, transference of knowledge and impacting other people. Women mentoring in construction is and should be encouraging and guiding other women to join the industry. Likewise mentoring them on career paths the mentor has taken and other opportunities available in the construction industry. On the other hand, career development is an important segment of every human's life, as everyone seeks a sustainable career that can also be developed upon over the years. Mentoring, therefore, is an essential tool to improving career development of women in construction. Mentoring is a supportive relationship between a superior and a less experienced junior colleague with a developmental role being achieved in the process [3]. The construction industry differs from other industry, in particular the typical white-collar jobs because of its dynamic nature and complex organization of work [4]. Therefore, the mentoring in the construction industry may differ from other industries due to the peculiarities of the industry.

The study by [5] mentioned that career theorist and researchers are continuously persuaded to examine the low participation of women in the construction industry and the under-utilization of their skills and abilities. The full competencies of women has been suppressed due to different anti-feminine characters associated with the construction industry. Whereas, the study by [6] opined that there are many socio-economic benefits the industry. Furthermore, there is need to scrutinize the issues about



career development for women [7]. This study further posits that attracting women into the construction industry is not enough, rather ensuring that they reach top corporate management tiers in their various organizations should be paramount [8, 9, 10]. With the rise of women in the construction profession, they may be able to share experiences and draw less experienced female workers to the top cadre. One major way of tackling this career advancement among women in the construction industry is through women mentoring. However, the strategy may be laced with barriers and prospects, this is what this study intends to investigate, through the following objectives, which are to:

- Identify the barriers to the use of women mentoring programs.
- Examine the impact of women mentoring programs in the construction industry.

## 2. Methodology

The study is an ongoing paperwork regarding career advancement of women in the construction industry. This area of inclusive workplace amongst the female gender proffers the solution of using women mentoring by female leaders in the construction industry. As pointed out by [11], the onus is on women to encourage the younger female students to take up career in the construction field after their undergraduate program. In this study, an in-depth literature review was used to sift through the barriers and impact to an effective mentoring program in the construction industry. Materials included published articles from major databases on the subject matter of mentoring and gender-related articles. A total of sixty (60) articles were downloaded from online journal outlets and libraries while only twenty-seven (27) were deemed adequate for this study. A discussion format was utilized to explain the objectives highlighted in this study.

## 3. Barriers to women mentoring programs

Several literature point to the fact that women face a lot of challenges in the construction industry. These challenges have been attributed to the image the industry portrays, male-dominance, poor working environment, undue pressure and so on [12, 13]. The image of the Nigerian construction industry especially is such that discriminates the contributions of women to the sector. While the working condition is not female-gender friendly, some women construction professionals thrive in the sector. Researchers in [14] opined that the poor image attributed to the industry is constantly been fuelled by the general lack of knowledge and limited insight into the potential career opportunities by prospective new entrants in the construction sector. This knowledge and information can be adequately passed across to less experienced female students/workers that have interest in building and construction activities. This is where the issue of mentoring comes in. However, the strategic solution of using women mentoring programs to attract and retain female students/workers in the construction profession is also met with some hurdles. An effective women mentoring program should be able to overcome these challenges.

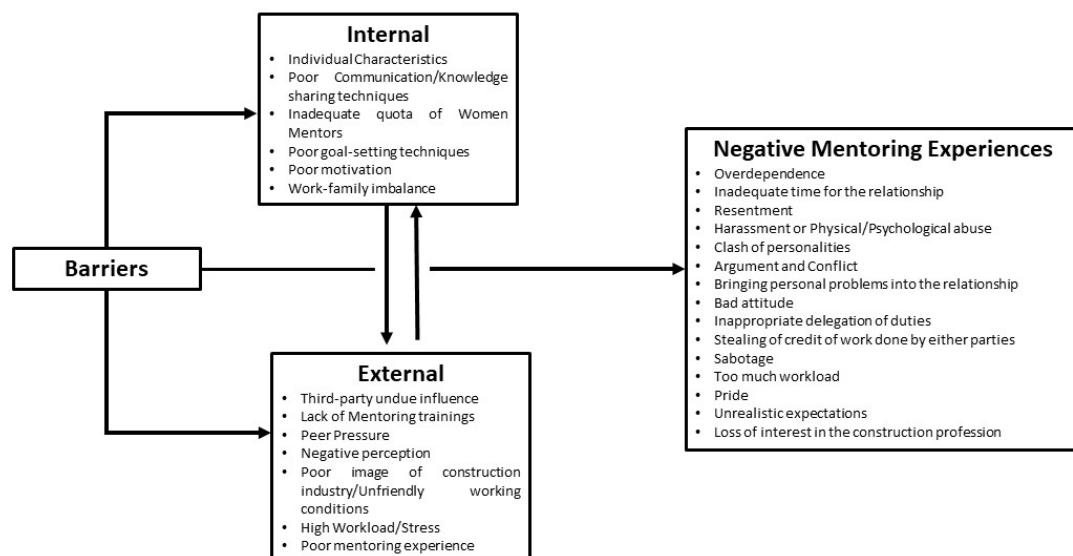
The study by [15] argued that one of the first step in developing a working framework for mentoring in the construction industry was identifying the characteristics of effective mentors and characteristics of a mentee that appeals to the mentor. In the end, both parties – mentor and mentee must possess the essential characteristics for mentoring to be qualified as effective [16]. Both parties must see it as an opportunity and rise to the occasion. The quality of the mentor-assisted relationship is essential in order to achieve success. According to [17], mentors must be a listener without any form of bias or unfair judgement and able to agree on outlined objectives rather than an enforcer of approaches. The mentor should be able to acknowledge, accept and appreciate noticeable differences between the mentor and mentee. Some characteristics identified by Stone (2007) of good and effective mentors include excellent supervisor, strong interpersonal qualities, recognizing the achievement of each other; ability to accept the risks and uncertainties associated with the mentoring process; and availability to the mentee based on agreed terms. The study by [16] included the following essential characteristics: setting concise objectives; flexibility; as well as building and maintaining close and harmonious relationships. The latter can be achieved through trust building, empathy and a focused mind-set. For an effective mentoring relationship, the mentor needs to pull and push the mentee through the mentoring cycle [19].

Using this mentoring style, [16] opined that the mentee is able to open up and feel safe in sharing strengths and limitations in the mentoring conversation to the mentor. The pattern ensures that the mentor is a listener and the thoughts of the mentee are stimulated in the process for better performance. An atmosphere of the mentee asking the right questions for career advancement needs to be created by the mentor. In this study, it is noted that when the right characteristics does not exist in the mentor and mentee there can be a clash of personalities, resentment, argument and loss of interest.

In the mentoring cycle, as crucial as the roles and characteristics of the mentors are, so is the part to be played by the mentee. In the study by [18] basic characteristics that an excellent mentee willing and committed to the process of empowerment need to demonstrate. Furthermore, [18] noted these characteristics such showing significant intelligence, creativity and willingness to take responsibility through the process of development. Additionally, [16] emphasized the crucial traits of being able to clearly express their needs in the growth process, goals setting; openness to contribution from the mentor; proper follow-up on set goals; punctuality at agreed meetings between the mentor and mentee; privacy and discretion; understanding of roles, responsibilities and set limits. The study by [15] carried out in the United States measured the crucial characteristics of effective mentors in the construction industry. The major characteristics identified from their study include communication skills, knowledge sharing, and correcting mistakes/giving negative feedback. However, [15] did not consider the characteristics of the mentees which is crucial for the success of a mentor-assisted relationship.

Another challenge is the inadequate supply of the right mentors for female students and workers. The findings in [20] noted that the availability of role models/mentors for women was a major challenge female students faced due to the low women representation in the industry. Therefore, some female students turn to men for the required mentorship while this is laced with cases of bias, sexual harassment and conflict. Women construction professionals should be encouraged for career advancement so as to increase the quota of women mentors to the younger generation.

There are other inhibiting factors which can negatively impact women mentoring relationships. The study by [21] considered them as external and internal factors. This is illustrated in Figure 1. Figure 1 showed barriers to women mentoring programs which can result in negative mentoring experiences for both the mentor and the mentee. The internal factors include impracticable goals set by mentees, lack of understand of each person's characteristics, lack of supervisory experience and an uneven motivation towards the mentee by the mentor [21]. While the external mentoring-hindering factors include insinuations about sexual suggestions, chitchats, overprotection, authoritarianism, involvement of the direct supervisor, lack of mentoring trainings, resentment of non-participating peers and negative categorization of women.



**Figure 1.** Barriers to women mentoring programs

#### 4. Impact of an effective women mentoring programs

Mentoring is all about the information that the mentor possess and the ability to communicate it to the mentee in a supportive manner. The construction industry is an information-driven sector which make mentoring crucial to new entrants. This study posits that women have a lot to gain from an effective mentoring program specifically targeted for women in the construction industry. It is worthy to note that it is not only the inexperienced mentee that is built in the process of mentoring but the firm where the mentee works, benefits in the mentoring cycle, including the construction industry. [22] noted that the mentoring process should be about constant engagement between the mentor and mentee without a shift in the goal of empowering the mentor being guided by the essential mentoring principles. Researchers in [7] added that mentoring can also be focused on employees that are under-performing at their workplace in order to re-engineer the individual to align with the goals of the firm and the industry. From the sole aim of empowerment, mentoring has been associated with increase in pay and advancement at workplace [23], improved satisfaction on the job and self-respect [24], and increase in commitment within the firm [25], and other psycho-social outcomes [23, 24].

In the study by [20], they tried to identify strategies that could help engender career development for women in the construction industry. Their study concluded that the use of role model/mentor scheme was most appropriate in the Australian construction sector. In [1], it was stated that the onus was on women in the New Zealand's construction industry to change the status quo for female mentees through personal approaches, forming networks and increased mentoring opportunities. A critical look at some mentorship programs for women showed that the purpose of empowerment is been achieved but the extent is the main concern. For instance, [13] recorded the activities of the UK Resource Centre (UKRC) which has a mentorship programme themed: 'Women Returners Strategy'. The mentorship programme is aimed at ensuring work life balance for all women involved in Science, Engineering and Technology (SET) jobs and engender better use of all the talent available by employers. By developing partnerships with different employers, qualified women are helped to easily return to SET careers by providing them with necessary advice, mentoring and networking, training, and flexible work placements. Another notable scheme in the United Kingdom referred to as the Oxford Women's Training Scheme (OWTS) offers women with less qualifications, trainings in information technology (IT), construction related works and other personal development training.

Through the process of mentoring, [22] stated that mentors should have the ability to help mentees discover themselves in order to increase their productivity. Sadly, not every senior colleague or individual with years of experience possess these abilities. Furthermore, [26] opined that mentors show mentees how to migrate from the theoretical knowledge garnered at tertiary institutions to the workplace in order to achieve career goals. This is supported by [27], in that the mentees' careers is developed as a result of mentors exposing them to the practical aspect of their career in a workplace. Figure 2 showed the impact of women mentoring programs in the construction industry. In Figure 2, achieving positive outcomes from an effective women mentoring program requires both the mentor and mentee to have being in a mentorship training/workshop.

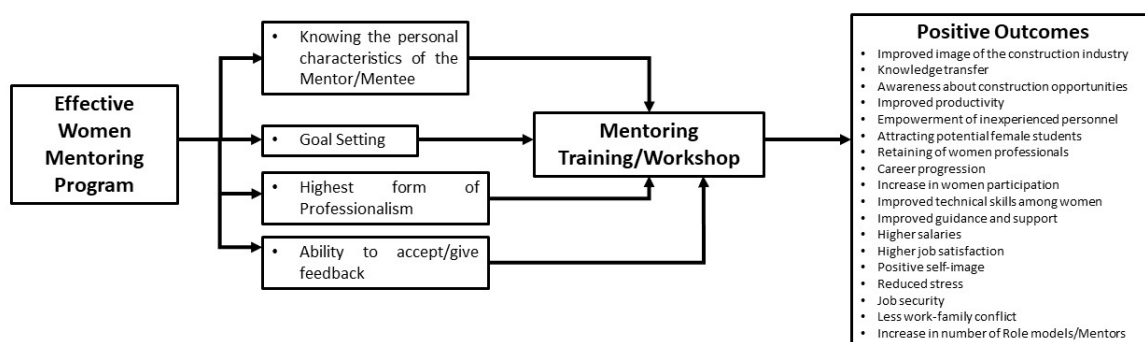


Figure 2. Impact of an effective women mentoring programs

## 5. Conclusion

The study examined the prospects of improving career development through women mentoring programs in the construction industry. The study showed that in order to access the positive potential outcome for female students and workers there are barriers that must be surpassed. The barriers to an effective women mentoring program identified in this study are both internal and external in nature. In the internal barriers, the factors identified include individual characteristics, poor communication/knowledge sharing techniques, inadequate quota of women mentors, poor goal-setting techniques, poor motivation and work-family imbalance. The external barriers identified include third-party undue influence, lack of mentoring trainings, peer pressure, negative perception, poor image of construction industry/unfriendly working conditions, high workload/stress and poor mentoring experience. Once the barriers to women mentoring programs are not effectively suppressed it would lead to negative mentoring experiences. The study highlighted that in order for women mentoring programs to be effective both mentors and mentees should have gone through a mentoring training/workshop. This would help harness their individual characteristics, ability to set goals, ensure professionalism and the ability to give/receive feedback. The study identified potential outcomes of an effective women mentoring program in the construction industry.

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